(c) if so, details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) There is no 'ideal ratio' as such between the number of post offices and the population. However, the target adopted for the second U.N. development decade was one post office to serve 3000 to 6000 people on an average. As against this target, in India the average population served by a post office is 4745. As a matter of fact, post offices are sanctioned based on a variety of criteria which include not only the population factor but also the distance from the nearest existing post office, the assessment of postal traffic in the area and the likely cost to be incurred as well as the revenue expected to be earned.

(b) and (c) The change effected recently relates to the population norms to be followed in rural areas. Under the earlier norms, *inter alia*, a minimum population of 2000 was prescribed for opening a post office. In backward and tribal areas the required population of a village together with its hamlets was fixed as 1000. In the revised norms, a post office will be planned for a group of villages, the combined population of which should be 5000 in normal rural areas and 2500 in hilly, backward and tribal areas. Within this group, a suitable village will be selected for locating the post office.

Expansion of Postal and Telecommunication facilities

616. SHRI KALPNATH RAI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of programmes drawn up for the expansion of postal and telecommunication facilities in the rural areas during the Seventh Plan; and

(b) the progress made so far in this

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) and (b) Postal: Through the successive Five-Year Plans, the Department has already built up a comprehensive rural postal network. At present there are 1,28,370 post offices functioning in rural areas. During the first two years of the Seventh Plan, namely 1985-86 and 1986-87, there was no programme of rural postal extension on account of the ban on creation of posts. The Ministry of Finance have since indicated special procedures for creation/filling up of posts required for implementation of Plan schemes. In pursuance thereof, the Deptt. has worked out norms and circles have been asked to carry out a fresh assessment in accordance with the norms. The proposals for post offices which satisfy the norms may be taken up with the Ministry of Finance for consideration.

Telecommunications: (a) 9,000 Long Distance Public Telephones are planned to be provided in the rural areas during the Seventh Plan.

(b) 3,067 Long Distance Public Telephones have been opened during the first two years of the seventh Plan.

Import of foreign technology for Railways

617. SHRI MOSTAFA BIN QUASEM: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that import of foreign techology is more beneficial for Indian Railways in developing high horse power electric locomotives, and

(b) if so, what are the shortcoming in indigenous technology and local manufacturing units?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA): (a) Yes, Sir.